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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with the different ways that gender is represented in the English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) classroom, and how this representation may contribute to the socialization of female language learners. Attention is focused primarily on the language teacher's understanding and awareness of gender representations, not to specific teacher actions. The analysis looks at: (1) the context of ESL instruction, often in places where little or no other English is heard; (2) the fact that most language teachers are female; (3) the materials used for instruction; and (4) instructional processes, including teacher behavior and interaction methodology (pair and group work). It is concluded that the ways that western textbooks represent gender, the ambivalence of some pedagogical grammars over new, progressive language items, the messages conveyed by instructional materials and classrooms to female learners about language use, and the opportunities they seem to distribute unfairly, do not maximally facilitate language learning for women and girls. (MSE)

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The Representation of Gender in the Language Classroom

This paper concerns teacher education, specifically, the teacher education of trainee or experienced teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) (1). Their teacher education may take the form of pre-service and/or in-service (INSET) courses, at home or, occasionally, abroad--in a university, college or language school.

The aspect of teacher education I am concerned with is gender, and the paper looks at different ways gender is represented in the EFL classroom, and, accordingly, at the different, though complementary messages these representations contain. Though problematic to posit direct, causal relationships between gender representation and gender-specific disadvantage, and even more so to gather empirical support (2), some or all of these ways may nevertheless contribute to the socialisation of women and girl students, as language learners, as language users--and as women or girls. In doing so, some or all of these ways may also contribute to their disempowerment in certain roles within certain practices. (The ways gender is represented may also be seen as capable of disadvantaging male students, in different ways; this is not, however, my concern here.)

For the purpose of this paper, the representation of gender is a matter of teacher awareness and understanding. I do not intend to discuss teacher <u>action</u> (for one thing, there can be no global (in the literal sense) set of remedial practices), though implicit in what follows is the idea that some sort of critical practice by the practitioner of teacher education <u>and</u> by the practitioner in the EFL classroom is needed.

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Let us look more closely at the teachers we are talking about. They teach English in institutions of secondary, adult or tertiary education; they work in places which may have little or no English in the environment; they themselves are likely to have a first language other than English (though they may be 'expert users' (Rampton, 1990)); they may use western EFL coursebooks and grammars or some variety of these or they may not; and they are largely female, putting into practice ideas which have come down from academics, textbook writers, members of Ministries and Department heads who are largely male. I hope to show that in one sense what these female teachers are doing is in effect reproducing existing relations of gender and power in their own classrooms (see Pennycook, 1980). It is significant that in many countries more male than female language students avoid becoming language teachers if they can help it--and, of those language students who do enter the EFL profession, that more males get out.

I am going to suggest that the ways gender is represented in the language classroom can be further divided into representation by 'materials' and representation by 'processes', the former including coursebooks, grammars, dictionaries and teachers' guides; the latter including interaction methodology (including pairwork and groupwork) and teacher behaviour (including linguistic behaviour) (see Fig. 1). Rather than seeing each these as containing a set of messages about gender (which can result in each being perceived as peripheral, and one person's ideosyncratic hang up), I think it is more useful to see them as coming from different discoursal practices, but containing related, gendered messages which female and male students alike may engage in struggle with.

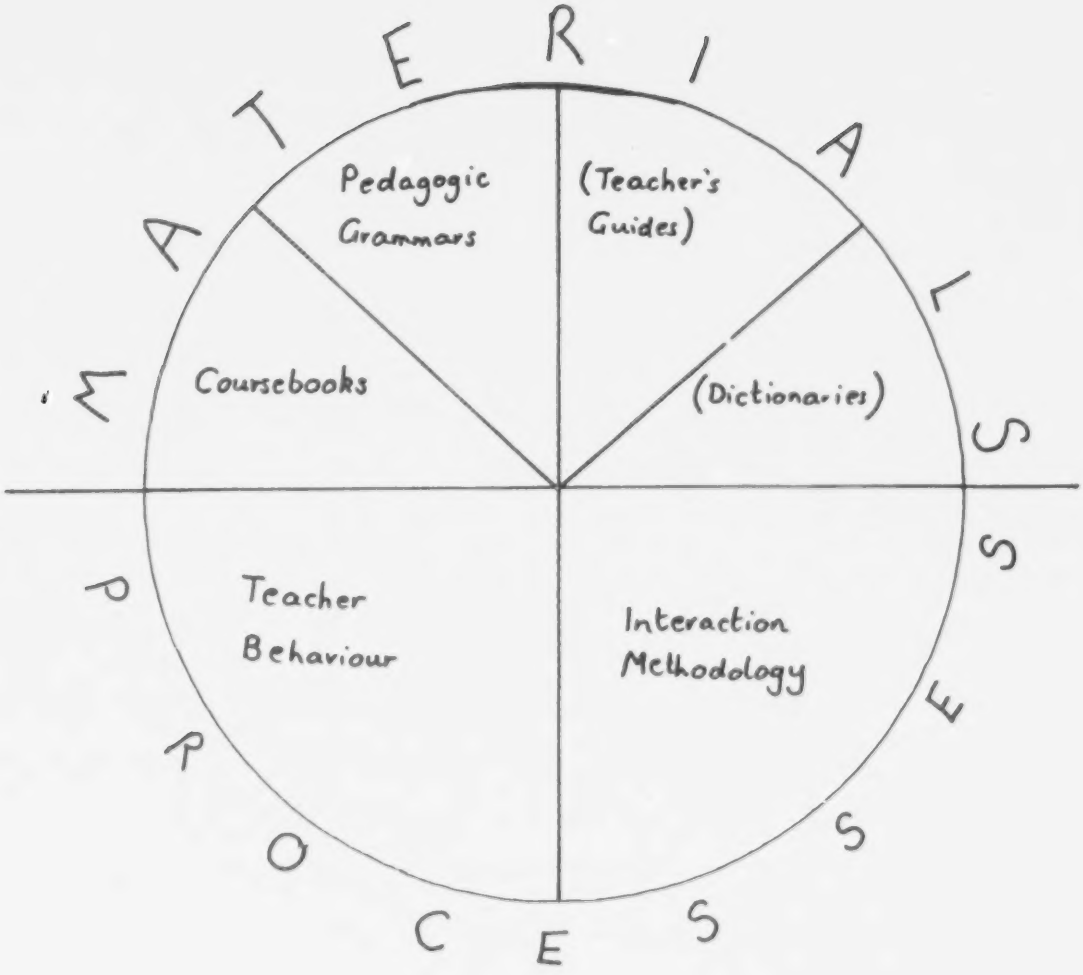

Fig. 1 : Materials and Processes

MATERIALS

Of the materials mentioned I shall look here at western coursebooks and pedagogic grammars.

Coursebooks

Studies of western EFL coursebooks have suggested the most salient gender-related features to be (a) the relative invisibility of female characters, and (b) females' limited roles, in terms of occupations and stereotyping (Porecca, 1984; Talansky, 1986). In Unit 55 of *Streamline Departures* (Hartley and Viney, 1978), for example, a lasciviously-drawn young woman in a short skirt is the 'cause' of a car accident: a driver is looking at her instead of the road. In Unit 39 of the same book, two men are presented uncritically talking about a woman in her presence; the dialogue concludes 'Is she coming to the dance tonight?' 'I hope so!' Sexism becomes misogyny in the 'Hitchhiking Maze' in *Mazes* (Berer and Rinvolucri, 1981: 48): the students are told 'you are a forty-year-old man', and one 'result' of a student choice of outcome is that two female hitchhikers who 'you' have given a lift to, say they will accuse 'you' of rape unless 'you' give them money. The problem is not that the female characters are not impeccable and/or bland; but rather that this 'story' is not only a furtherance of the 'scheming, malicious' woman stereotype but also a reversal of the truth. It is female hitchhikers who risk being victims, and to suggest the reverse is, at best, dishonest. What the

relationship of coursebooks to social reality should be is contraversial (3), but I have never heard anyone advocating standing reality on its head.

A further study illustrates how gender-differences can also exist (in both text and visuals) in age (females being younger); body language, positions and actions (females being more sedentary, less active); and clothes (women dressing more formally, in a narrower range of styles) (ETHEL, 1980) (4).

Even more interesting, perhaps, are coursebook gender differences in language use. ETHEL examined language functions exemplified by female and male characters in *Network* (Kay *et al*, 1980). The language functions indeed differed with the characters' gender, and not always in an arbitrary way. Those exemplified by women included:

talking about other people's likes and habits
saying when she's free
agreeing

and those by men:

asking where people/things are
giving orders (to women)
talking about own and other people's likes and habits
asking a woman out

Taking the first edition of the beginners' book *Functions of English* (Jones, 1977), in a study which is as illustrative and useful for what it looked for as well as for what it found, ETHEL focussed on the dialogue in the first unit, entitled 'Talking about yourself, starting a conversation, making a date'. Useful for men (it is of course a male who does the asking)

who wish to makes dates with women, it is less useful perhaps for women who would really rather know how to decline (in the dialogue Sally accepts) (5). Looking then at all the mixed-sex dialogues, ETHEL found that a male character spoke first each time. Thus it is John, not Sally, who is identified with 'Starting a conversation'. This finding is interesting for its subtlety and perniciousness: an absence of female characters is immediately obvious to people aware of and angered by such things; consistent 'male firstness' in dialogues may, and I am sure does, escape notice (6).

Why do these things matter? Convincing reasons must be offered to publishers, administrators, teachers and students if any change is to be achieved. And it is not enough to say 'I and other teachers don't like the sexism in these books', since this invites the responses 'most teachers don't care' and 'the students aren't complaining'.

Most convincing would be if these western coursebooks' representations of gender were seen as having the power to affect students as language learners and language users, for unless it is believed that they do, or can, observations such as those described above and resultant protests are likely to fall on deaf ears through their being perceived as trivial and lacking in professionalism if not in relevance to EFL and the wider world. I would therefore like to propose three arguments about how the representation of gender in western EFL coursebooks can affect students as language learners and users. These arguments can be made for all EFL classes in which western coursebooks play an important role.

Starting with what is perhaps the weakest argument: if TV, films, videos, computer games, newspapers and children's books can have a subliminal influence on (some of) their audience, so, surely, can EFL coursebooks. And any subliminal influence of female characters with restricted social, behavioural and linguistic roles does not sound like being particularly empowering for female readers.

A second, stronger argument is the affective one that if female students are conscious of the portrayal of the coursebook female characters as numerically inferior and as having limited roles, and are offended or alienated, or made to feel marginalised by the coursebook because of this consciousness, this could be demotivating, and as such more likely to hinder than facilitate their language learning. There is clearly need and scope for research here.

Thirdly, and, as I see it, most importantly, coursebook models of language can <u>become</u> classroom practice. In a mixed-sex class using *Functions of English* it is likely that both in a demonstration and in pair-work practice of a mixed-sex dialogue the males in the class will speak first, not only giving them more practice in the language function of 'Initiating a Conversation', but also giving female and male students alike more models of a conversational discourse characterised by 'male firstness'. (For more examples of the coursebook/classroom interface see Sunderland (forthcoming).) Again, research would help establish the extent to which such coursebook models <u>do</u> become classroom practice.

Any effect of a coursebook on both female and male learners must be mediated by how it is used and understood, by them individually, by them as classmates, and by them and the teacher as a class. The stereotypes and patterns may, for example, be celebrated, endorsed as unproblematic, or put forward for questioning, challenge and objects of class criticism. Any of these could of course provide learning opportunities, each of a different nature. Critical reading of the book may rest entirely with the teacher and students; alternatively, if there is a teacher's guide to the coursebook, questioning and challenging the content may be a regular part of the pedagogy (or the implicit brief may be acceptance of the content).

Pedagogic Grammars

Pedagogic grammars are important, among other things, for their representation and evaluation of 'gendered English', especially when this is recognisably undergoing change. I am here referring particularly to these grammars' portrayal of these (groups of) linguistic items: alternatives to the so-called 'generic' *he, him* and *his*, nouns which are not (or are no longer only 'masculine' or 'feminine' (e.g. *chairperson, poet*), and the honorific *Ms*.

In my own study (Sunderland, 1986) I looked at 22 English grammars, 20 of which were pedagogic grammars, published or being written between 1975 and 1985. I wanted to find out (a) if any examples of the three above items were included, and, if so, (b) what was said about them. In principle,

pedagogic grammars have an obligation to describe new forms as long as they are in reasonably common usage and do not flout the rules of English syntax. However, pedagogic grammars must also be selective, and whether these items are selected, as well as what they say about them, will depend very much on the individual author.

According to these grammars, 'generic' *he* is still largely acceptable. Yet to many speakers and writers in many contexts it is definitely not (Purnell, 1978; Bate, 1978; Cooper, 1984; Cameron, 1984). So what is these grammars' reaction to the fact that English appears to be changing in this respect?

they after an indefinite pronoun such as *everyone* ('Everyone brought their own lunch') is deemed all right as an informal alternative in speaking. However, a student may well not be encouraged to use it. Further, the grammars are not consistent. For example:

> The use of plural pro-forms to refer to singular nouns premodified by *each* or *every* is not uncommon but often avoided by careful writers.
>
> (Van Ek and Robat, 1984: 3.32)

The same student might read

> Sometimes we can emphasise [the fact that a person referred to can be male or female] by using both pronouns [*he or she*]....However, this is becoming less acceptable. The tendency is to avoid this kind of construction by using plurals.
>
> (Alexander, 1988: 51)

and be further confused.

Other alternatives (e.g. *his or her*, etc., *s/he*) are given but largely deemed stylistically inferior, being described variously, and subjectively, as 'pedantic', 'unwieldy', 'cumbersome', 'heavy' and 'awkward'. The most recent of the 20 grammars, *An A - Z of English Grammar and Usage* (Leech *et al*, eventually published 1989: 424-5), and a 1990 grammar, *Using English Grammar: Meaning and Form* (Woods and McLeod, 1990: 174) are positive about these alternatives, the latter providing both an accurate description/ explanation and useful advice:

> ...['generic'] **his** is considered by many people to be offensive since it has a gender bias. There is a general tendency in English today to avoid sexist language. Two ways of avoiding it are either to use both the feminine and the masculine (**her or his**, or **his/her**) or to use the plural (**their**). In **informal** speech and writing, the second alternative, the use of **their**, is the most usual way to deal with the problem. In **formal** writing, the first alternative is more common.

The *-ess* decline (e.g. *poetess* and *authoress* now being largely replaced by the generics *poet* and *author*) is mentioned only infrequently, but with a clear statement about the decline. Thus in *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, not a pedagogic grammar but one which is often available to teachers, we read

> Some optional forms (*poetess, authoress*) are no longer in normal use, being replaced by the dual gender forms (*poet, author*, etc.) In order to avoid sexual bias in language, efforts have been made (esp. in AmE) to introduce sex-neutral forms, such as... *flight attendant* for *airline hostess*....The dual class is on the increase.
>
> (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik, 1985: 315)

-person words were mentioned more in grammars published in the second half of the period (1981 - 1985) than the first (1975 - 1980), but were invariably made to sound somewhat deviant. Interesting here is the change over editions. In the third edition of *Practical English Grammar* (Thompson and Martinet, 1980: 9) we read

> Recently there has been an attempt to desex these words [*salesman, saleswoman, chairman, chairwoman, etc.*] *by using -person* instead of *-man*. This fashion may not last.
>
> (my underlining)

The fourth edition of 1986, referring to exceptions to the majority of personal nouns, which "have the same form" for masculine and feminine, reads

> Also *salesman, saleswoman*, etc., but sometimes *-person* is used instead of *-man, -woman: salesperson, spokesperson*.
>
> (Thompson and Martinet, 1985: 2)

Ms gained in acceptability over the period according to the number of mentions in the grammars--though, again, some comments were more encouraging than others. *Practical English Usage* (Swan, 1980: 212), reads

> *Ms* is used to refer to women who do not wish to have to say whether they are married or not. It is common in America, and becoming common in Britain.

One reading of the first sentence is that there is something a little strange about the women referred to, even that such women are being deliberately evasive or coy. Holmes (personal communication) observes that the sentence is also misleading, since *Ms* is used at least as often to address women (in speech or writing) as to refer to them (7).

Why does all this matter? Since English is changing in this respect, at least in some contexts, new uses should be reflected accurately in grammars, along with their traditional variants, in a way that is not over-subjective, does not discourage students, and helps them speak and write a variety of English which does not sound old-fashioned. EFL students--and their teachers--frequently treat grammars with great respect: not only is it 'knowledge', their grammar book (with their dictionary) may be what they perceive as their only completely reliable source of data about the English language. Hence the amazement and horror of many EFL students and teachers when they discover 'singular *they*'--it goes against all they have learned about number concord. (This is presumably why non-native speakers of English seem to take happily to *his or her*, but not 'singular *they*'--whereas my own questionnaire study suggests native speakers of English to be the other way round (Sunderland, 1986)) (8).

Equally important, accurate description of these items by the writers of pedagogic grammars underlines how language <u>is</u> in a constant state of change--an important bit of 'language awareness', as is some understanding of <u>why</u> 'gendered English' is changing. Reference to and discussion of the relevant sections of pedagogic grammars in class can promote an understanding that there are relationships between language and society, and that changes in gender in the one are in some way related to changes in gender in the other. Pedagogic grammars, then, have an ideological role to play in the representation of gender in the language classroom, in that where 'gendered English' is concerned they position both female and male readers as members of <u>one or other</u> gender group, and point to the changes,

the struggle, located in this opposition. This role may be covert, or may be made more overt through discussion.

PROCESSES

Processes clearly represent gender in the language classroom via behaviour rather than the text. One message both processes and materials can carry, however, is that of women and girls as marginalised in relation to their male peers. This marginalisation is perhaps more easily demonstrated in processes than in materials.

Though I am looking here at two particular 'processes', 'teacher behaviour' and 'interaction methodology', I am not suggesting the two do not overlap. A teacher's behaviour, for example, can itself be part of interaction methodology (9).

Teacher Behaviour

I am going to look at three ways in which gender is represented through teacher behaviour.

The first is a phenomenon which seems to hold for all mixed-sex classes: female and male teachers, in secondary and tertiary institutions, however committed they are to equal treatment of female and male students, show they spend more time with male students--even when aware of the

tendency to do so (Spender, 1982: 56). Transcripts of recordings of lessons demonstrate this time and again. Further, insidiously, what seems like 'equal time for the girls' can be is not only less than 50%, but actually perceived as more:

> ...sometimes I have even thought I have gone too far and have spent more time with the girls than the boys. But the tapes have proved otherwise. Out of ten taped lessons (in secondary school and college) the maximum time I spent interacting with girls was 42% and on average 38%, and the minimum time with boys 58%. It is nothing short of a substantial shock to appreciate the discrepancy between what I *thought* I was doing and what I actually *was* doing (Spender, 1982: 56).

It would appear to be something of a triumph for patriarchal ideology that more time for the boys, less for the girls, has been thus 'naturalised'.

This false perception is not only experienced by the teacher. Another teacher in Spender's study, who also thought she had spent more time with the girls only to find they had received only 34% of her attention, added that "the boys...were complaining about me talking to the girls all the time." And though not all boys get more attention than all girls, this tendency clearly cuts down on the total time available for all girls.

What does this mean for the EFL classroom? Boys on the whole get more speaking practice and more feedback on the utterances they produce. Holmes (1989), analysing data from ESL classrooms in Australia and New Zealand, found that the (adult) male students both responded more to the teachers' questions and asked more questions themselves--thus getting more practice in question-related language functions than the female students.

This 'more time for the boys' tendency also means that the EFL classroom provides a model of discourse of males both speaking and initiating more, the latter echoing the patterns of mixed-sex conversation modelled in *Functions of English*.

The second way gender is represented in the language classroom through the teacher's behaviour concerns one of the language teacher's roles (10): to promote competence, overtly or otherwise, in the grammar of the target language. Grammar must include the new, gendered items of *-person* words and other results of language change, such as the decline in frequency of use of the 'generic' *he*, and increase in (spoken) 'singular *they*' already discussed. These are items which students may come across in reading or listening texts, and be surprised by; they may ask their EFL teacher to explain and judge them. Yet the teacher, who is probably living and working in an environment which includes little or no English, may be unaware of these changes, or the sociolinguistic context in which they have occurred. How s/he does must represent in some way gender in and beyond the English language.

Thirdly, perhaps most straightforwardly, the teacher's behaviour represents gender in the language classroom through her/his role of providing, of *being* a model of the target language, English. This s/he will do with varying degrees of accuracy and fluency--but the actual model of gendered (and possibly other) language may vary with the teacher's gender as well as whether English is her/his first or a subsequent language. My

own questionnaire study found female native and non-native speaker teachers of English more willing to use *chairperson* than males from the same group (Sunderland, 1985) (11); there may be gender differences in teachers' use of other gendered items of English (12). These might then interact with native speaker/non-native speaker of English differences in preference for 'singular *they*' or *his or her*.

Interaction Methodology

'Interaction methodology' refers to pairwork or groupwork involving all the students in the class at the same time. These are methodological techniques closely associated with communicative language teaching, and are intended to increase opportunities for classroom communication in general, spoken interaction in particular, and, hopefully, for development of proficiency in the foreign language. Holmes, again looking at ESL classes in Australia and New Zealand, found that in pair and groupwork male students spoke more frequently and took longer turns than the females, who provided more feedback--this echoing findings with mixed-sex groups of native speakers of English. The female students, then, were providing an ideal context for the males to practice in, but were not getting a fair share of conversational encouragement themselves (Holmes, 1989).

Conclusion

I have illustrated here some of the ways in which gender operates and is represented in the language classroom, some of which appear to have the potential to contribute to the socialisation of female language learners, both as women or girls and as language learners, and which may in the process actually disadvantage them--again, as language learners, language users and female people. This is not to suggest that other minority groups, or indeed male students, are not disadvantaged--though I would suggest that other such 'disadvantagings' would be through different routes and have different manifestations and effects.

To recap. Textbooks with dialogues and visuals intended to illustrate everyday conversation; pedagogic grammars with careful explanations of use; classroom events such as pairwork, groupwork and teacher-student interaction have all evolved and been developed in the hope that they will facilitate language learning--for all learners. However the ways western coursebooks represent gender; the ambivalence of some pedagogic grammars over new, progressive language items; the messages coursebooks and classrooms convey to female learners about language use; and the opportunities coursebooks and classrooms seem to distribute unfairly, when looked at as contributing to a whole paradigm of gender, shed doubt on the potential of materials and processes in the EFL classroom to maximally facilitate language learning for women and girls.

Since there are no simple causal relationships between the representation of gender in the language classroom and the proficiency and progress of female language learners, there is no package of corrective responses waiting to be implemented. In any case, no one 'package' could ever be appropriate to all circumstances, each of which is likely to contain within it, among other things, its own form of resistance--from students, colleagues and/or 'superiors' (13). But we surely have enough insights now to give gender and its representation in the language classroom a place in both the initial and in-service teacher education of modern language teachers. From this, appropriate local action may follow.

Jane Sunderland

Notes

(1) English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to the learning of English in a country where English is very little used. It contrasts with English as a Second Language (ESL), which refers to the learning of English for use within a country where English is widely used--where is is, for example, the most commonly used language, the/an official language, the language of government or the official medium of education. This paper concerns the EFL classroom; much of it, however, may apply also to the ESL classroom.

(2) For discussion of both these points, see Davies, B. 1989. *Frogs, Snails and Feminist Tales*, University of New England Press and Walkerdine, V. 1989. *Counting Girls Out*, Virago.

(3) For example, should coursebooks reflect social reality as accurately as possible (and show, for example, as tiny a proportion of women in positions of power as is the case), or should they provide as many 'positive role models' as possible (and make fifty percent--or more!--of powerful characters in coursebooks female)?

(4) Sadly, ETHEL no longer exists. She was a group of women EFL teachers working in Italy in the late 70's and early 80's who put out several issues of a radical newsletter dealing largely with language and language teaching from a feminist perspective. I am unable to find the date of the particular study under discussion here--which was also of *Network* (see paragraph below).

(5) Interestingly, in the second edition of *Functions of English* the dialogue concludes with John and Sally just exchanging phone numbers. Had ETHEL's criticism reached them?

(6) While not wishing to be an apologist, I am not claiming that any of the writers of these coursebooks created sexist situations out of malevolence, but presumably more from a lack of awareness. Such situations would probably be edited out in the nineties. However, many of these books are still in wide use. The *Streamline* series is particularly ubiquitous and popular. (Many, though not all, *Streamline* units are sexist in one way or another.)

(7) Holmes (personal communication) suggests an alternative, less loaded representation:

> The title *Ms* is preferred by women who regard marital status as irrelevant information in addressing women as it is in addressing men.

(8) Observation suggests that native speakers of English use the 'singular *they*' naturally and automatically in spoken English. This is not a recent phenomenon (Abbott, 1984). It contrasts, however, with non-native speaker use. In my own study, only twelve out of eighteen non-native speakers of English said they would accept as correct 'singular *they*' in writing compared with thirteen out of fourteen native speakers of English. But for written *his or her*, sixteen of the eighteen non-native speakers of English said they would accept this, compared with eight out of the fourteen native speakers of English.

(9) I am grateful to Janet Holmes (personal communication) for this observation.

(10) What language teacher's roles were, are and should be is another contraversial question and I am not suggesting that 'promoting competence in the grammar of the target language' should be accepted as given. However, my feeling is that most language teachers would in fact see this as one of their more important roles.

(11) The figures were eleven out of twenty female respondents, compared with four out of twelve male repondents.
(12) This would parallel findings of gender differences in language use posited for native speakers of English (e.g. Kramer, 1974; Edelsky, 1981). However, it should be remembered that studies demonstrating such differences are frequently criticised (e.g. Cameron, 1985b).
(13) Resistance can take several forms, from total non-comprehension, through expressions of how trivial or quaint such concerns are, not wishing to offend, accusations of chips on shoulders and bees in bonnets, to outright hostility.

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